

IN THE CLAIMS

The claims are amended as follows:

Claims 1-13 (Canceled)

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein said formulation comprises a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a number average particle diameter of less than 2 μm determined by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein the one or more substances are selected from aldehyde tanning agents, and wherein the aldehyde tanning agents are glutaraldehyde or a derivative of glutaraldehyde.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 14, wherein the clay mineral has a number average particle diameter of less than 1 μm .

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in claim 14, wherein said formulation further comprises one or more substances, which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral.

Claim 18 (Cancelled)

Claim 19 (Cancelled)

Claim 20 (Cancelled)

Claim 21 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein the clay mineral has a number average particle diameter of less than 1 μm .

Claim 22 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 30, wherein said formulation further comprises one or more substances, which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral.

Claim 23 (Cancelled)

Claim 24 (Currently amended): The method as claimed in claim ~~23~~ 32, wherein the phyllosilicate is selected from the group consisting of a kaolinite, smectite, muscovite, montmorillonite, bentonite, or hectorite and mixtures thereof.

Claim 25 (Cancelled)

Claim 26 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein said animal hide is a tanned animal hide.

Claim 27 (Cancelled)

Claim 28 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 22, wherein the one or more substances which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, are selected from the group consisting of urea or urea derivatives, alcohols, polyols, propylene carbonate, organic amides, urethanes, saccharides or derivatives of saccharides, nitrocellulose, sulfite cellulose, ethylhexylcellulose, and mixtures thereof.

Claim 29 (Cancelled)

Claim 30 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein said formulation comprises:

a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , determined in each case by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering, and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight.

Claim 31 (Cancelled)

Claim 32 (Currently Amended): A method for chrome-free and chrome tanning, comprising contacting an animal hide with a formulation comprising:

a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a number average particle diameter of less than 2 μm , or a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , determined in each case by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering, and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight;

and one or more substances selected from the group consisting of organic polymers, aldehyde tanning agents, sulfone tanning agents, resin tanning agents, phenol tanning agents, fatliquoring agents, vegetable tanning agents, dyes, pigments and mixtures thereof,

wherein the clay mineral is a phyllosilicate selected from the group consisting of kaolinite, smectite, muscovite, montmorillonite, bentonite, hectorite and mixtures thereof.

Claim 33 (Cancelled)

Claim 34 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein the clay mineral is muscovite.

Claim 35 (Cancelled)

Claim 36 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 32, wherein the clay mineral is hectorite.

Claim 37 (Cancelled)

Claim 38 (Previously Presented): The method as claimed in Claim 17, wherein the one or more substances which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, are selected from the group consisting of urea or urea derivates, alcohols, polyols, propylene carbonate, organic amides, urethanes, saccharides or derivatives of saccharides, nitrocellulose, sulfite cellulose, ethylhexylcellulose, and mixtures thereof.